

Behavioral Management System

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I. Introduction: Overview of the classroom/behavioral management system

The Career Center in which I work has a behavior management system that is composed of a set of rules described in the student handbook. Behavioral expectations vary widely from classroom to classroom. We are physically attached to one of our sending high schools. The high school strongly influences what happens in the technical center. Thus, there are two behavioral management systems in place on the campus, and each classroom operates under its own guidelines. According to our Assistant Director, one of the challenges we face is that behavior management needs to start in the classroom. (Lawler, 13) While there is some consistency between the systems, there are many grey areas in terms of the expectations placed on students, the interventions and services provided to them, and the levels of parent involvement in issues.

Documented disciplinary interventions are relatively few in number with 59 infractions this year and 53 for 2011-2012 with 38 and 21 students respectively contributing to those infractions. (Lawler, 2013) Approximately four hundred students are enrolled part time in courses each semester. (Swisher, 2013) Categories for the current year infractions are as follows: disrupting class (2), computer violations (2), cutting class (6), drug use (1), drug possession (1), electronic device violation (3), forging a pass (1), inappropriate behavior (4), insubordination (4), disrespectful language (6), leaving school grounds (1), leaving class (6) plagiarism (2), profanity (1), safety violation (1), excessive tardiness (2), theft (1), tobacco possession (2), tobacco use (13). The most common sanctions were referred to law enforcement to be ticketed & fined for tobacco (11) lunch detention (10) out of school suspension (9), in school suspension (8). (Lawler, 2013)

Issues which receive a great deal of attention within the school are dress code and attendance. It is common for there to be PA announcements regarding dress code from two to five times per week. Interestingly, none of the documented referrals are for dress code violations. Both students and faculty see the dress code as being selectively enforced. Informal sanctions range from warnings to being asked to change into other clothes before going back to classes.

Our attendance policy states that a student with over ten absences in a class will lose course credit. Computer generated warning letters are sent home at three, six and nine absences. A certified letter is sent home when a student reaches ten. Presently, the list of students with more than ten absences in a class contains forty two names.

Vermont statute requires that every school will have in place an Educational Support Team (EST) and that that support team that identifies the needs of students and the school's plans to meet those student needs. (Vermont, ND) At the present time, my school does not have a functioning EST in place. Further, intervention services such as counseling and social services are not provided for within our school. Referrals can be made to a student's sending school or to community agencies. As a technical center, we often deal with students who may not have felt successful in a traditional academic setting. Some of these students might benefit from interventions through an EST.

II. System effectiveness

While the school documents relatively few issues with student behavior, a disconnect between this system and student self-reporting may be evident. The Vermont Youth Risk Behavior survey for 2011 recorded the following data for our campus as a whole: 19% of students reported being offered, sold or given illegal drugs on campus within the past year; 16%

of students reported being bullied within the last thirty days; and 8% reported carrying a weapon in school. While this data is not limited to the population of this school, it might suggest that these issues are evident within our population.

The school is generally a safe and respectful learning environment with few incidents that compromise student safety or health. However, the data available may not fully support identifying areas of needed improvement.

III. Issues with implementation and/or procedure

The documentation of behavioral issues may not accurately portray discipline issues, as some teachers report being reluctant to write up students for infractions. One teacher stated that she only uses referrals when he expects a consequence to be applied by the administration. Most behavioral issues are dealt with informally within classrooms. This leads to a condition in which it is difficult to identify and target patterns across the center. Further it may suggest inconsistency in how rules are applied. This contrasts the assistant director's statement that the strengths of the system are "consistency and rapid response." (Lawler, 2013)

As the most thoroughly documented issue is excessive absence, it would seem that this behavior should be targeted. According to our Special Needs Coordinator it is unlikely that more than a handful of students will actually be denied course credit, based on previous years' experience. She stated concern that with advocacy, students with truly excessive and poorly explained absences are frequently excused. She further expressed concern that students without strong advocates may be sanctioned even in cases where they barely exceed the limit. Each year, large lists of students exceeding the number of allowable absences are generated. This might suggest that warnings and potential credit loss are not effective in changing the behavior.

The Absence of an EST is of great concern, as the school functions without a focused approach to assist students in need of intervention. Teachers do tend to support their program students in numerous ways, but without a center wide intervention system, there is risk that students will fall through the cracks.

IV. Communication with parents and community about the system

Parents are made aware of handbook rules at the beginning of each course or upon entry into a new course. A well-established system including parent sign off on having received and read the policies is in place and is tracked. Parents are also made aware of attendance issues through the attendance letter system. However, parent involvement in overall aspects of the behavior management system is minimal and participation is frequently only encouraged when a serious problem exists. However, some teachers do choose to do significant parent outreach throughout their classes, and they report that this can sometimes be helpful. Possibly increased efforts to involve parents center wide would be helpful in improving students' progress, motivation and behavior.

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